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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 6191
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 3874
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3733
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000147

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: RED CRESCENT SOCIETY BROACHES SENSITIVE ISSUE OF DRUG ADDICTION WITH SUCCESS

REF: 09 Ashgabat 858

ASHGABAT 00000147 001.2 OF 002

¶1. (SBU) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Coordinator for the Red Crescent's Society's Drug Demand Reduction Project reported on the project's recent and upcoming activities. She gave a detailed overview, highlighting, in particular, the work that the project's provincial instructors do with target groups. Most impressive was the story of a dedicated instructor from Balkan Province who went far beyond her job description to help one addict give up drugs. END SUMMARY.

EDUCATING ON THE PERILS OF DRUG USE AND ADDICTION

¶3. (SBU) Post's INL Assistant met with the International Red Crescent Society's (IRCS) INL-funded Drug Demand Reduction Project (DDRP) coordinator on January 28. In the meeting, the coordinator provided an overview of the project's activities. She described its accomplishments and discussed plans for the upcoming six months. The DDRP was registered with the Ministry of Justice and began its activities in September 2008. If not renewed, the project will terminate in July 2010. With seven full-time staff members (Coordinator, Assistant and five provincial instructors) and representation in all five provinces, the project works to educate young Turkmen on the hazards of illicit drug use. The instructors recruit and train volunteers among high school students and establish "peer-to-peer" training programs. They also publish and distribute anti-drug brochures, leaflets, newspaper articles, and conduct anti-drug presentations for the target groups: Teachers, students, organizational clerks, soldiers and family members.

A FOCUS ON STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

¶4. (SBU) Lachin Kulhanova, the Coordinator, said that teachers and students are the easiest target groups to work with: In 2009, they reached a total of 3,898 high school students and 1,468 teachers throughout the country. The IRCS has a letter of agreement with the

Ministry of Education that permits them to visit educational facilities and make presentations. School principals have been highly receptive, making time for the presentations during school hours. The students, too, are reportedly very enthusiastic about the sessions, participating actively in the discussions. Some share life stories about drug-addicted relatives or neighbors and the devastating effects on families. Some, whom she described as the "bravest," go as far detailing life with a drug addicted father or brother.

SOLDIERS AND WORKERS: LESS RECEPTIVE

¶ 15. (SBU) By contrast, conducting outreach to soldiers and company employees has been much more difficult. Instructors go to municipalities, hospitals, labor unions, companies and factories. Last year, for example, the energy company Petronas requested that the IRCS give presentation on drug abuse for field office employees in Balkanabat. The employees who attended, however, were bored and uninterested, a reaction that is reportedly typical.

BUT MOD IS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED

¶ 16. (SBU) Working with soldiers has also been a challenge. It is difficult to gain access to military facilities (some commanding officers refuse outright), and thus far only 506 soldiers have been educated on drug abuse. Recently, one provincial instructor gave a presentation at a military barracks that coincided with an MOD inspection. The MOD visitors (officers from Ashgabat) at first acted blas, but later were so impressed with the presentation that they sent a letter to the IRCS provincial office. In it, they thanked the IRCS for organizing such a useful event for the soldiers, and said they hoped they would continue in the future.

ASHGABAT 00000147 002.2 OF 002

A COMPASSIONATE INSTRUCTOR: ONE ADDICT'S STORY

¶ 17. (SBU) Another area of success has been in outreach to rural families. In 2009, IRCS instructors spoke with 1,177 family members, although gaining access to them is not always easy. Local medical clinics have been helpful by sending family physicians with the instructors to the homes to introduce them to their patients. One instructor from Balkanabat whose husband died from drug addiction, showed dedication well beyond her job description: During one visit to a family, she encountered an addicted man. She returned to the home several times to talk with him, trying to persuade him to give up his drug habit. The man was apparently so moved by her words and concern that he resolved to quit, at one point even pouring boiling water on his foot in order to prevent himself from going out to buy drugs. He has reportedly been drug-free for the past six months.

PEER TRAINERS

¶ 18. (SBU) The IRCS has also recruited 15 "peer trainers" from among its volunteers in the provinces. They, too, give presentations to their classmates and friends, but unlike the instructors, are not paid for their work. The program also has 22 volunteers, who assist in distributing anti-drug brochures and giving logistical support to the instructors and peer trainers. The IRCS provides them with a monthly gratuity basket containing items such as detergent, soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes and towels.

¶ 19. (SBU) DDRP instructors usually conduct a pre-test to their audience on their knowledge of drug abuse before starting on the presentations. After the presentations, they give a post-test, with scores that show an average increase of 24%. For the next six months, the DDRP staff plan to continue working with the target groups. In June, on the eve of the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking, they plan to conduct a series of events, including distributing brochures and leaflets and drawing contests for children.

¶ 10. (SBU) COMMENT: Since its inception, the Drug Demand Reduction Project has operated successfully all over Turkmenistan. Initially, the organizers had planned to distribute anti-drug leaflets in public areas and hold public discussions on drug use and addiction.

With the successful outreach of provincial instructors and peers, however, the program has become much more than that. Post plans two provincial monitoring trips during the month of February. As the project implementation period comes to an end, Post plans to request additional INL funding so that it may be continued. END COMMENT.

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